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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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2 April 1967

State Dept. review completed

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

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Village Council elections got under way in South Vietnam on 2 April with few incidents noted.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Nearly 600 Communists killed by JUNCTION CITY troops in northern Tay Ninh Province following the third regimental-size enemy attack since 19 March (Paras. 1-3). Viet Cong planners in the Mekong Delta prepare contingency plans to pull out when the allied pressure increases in the delta provinces (Paras. 4-6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Village Council elections started in South Vietnam today and appear to be proceeding without incident (Para. 1). On 1 April, Chief of State Thieu formally promulgated the new constitution in Saigon (Paras. 2-4). Retired General Tran Van Don appears to be trying to find a political berth with one of the potential candidates for the presidency of South Vietnam (Paras. 5-6).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

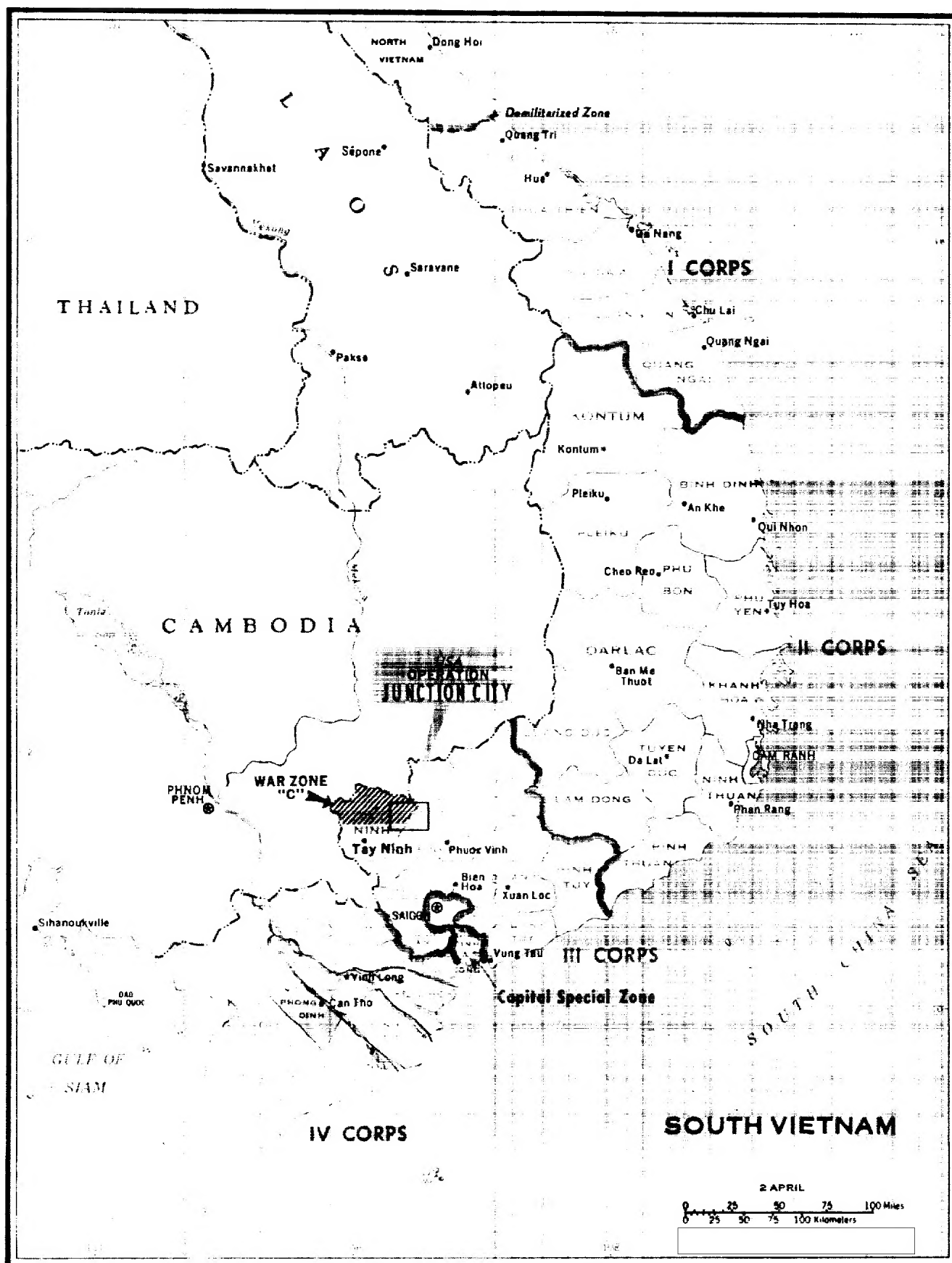
A recent article by a North Vietnamese general implies that Hanoi's military planners are still divided over certain basic issues relating to the war in South Vietnam (Paras. 3-8).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: A captured Communist notebook contains details from a high-level briefing on Hanoi's attitude toward negotiations (Paras. 1-6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The pace of military activity slackened over the weekend following the largest battle of the 5 1/2-week-old Operation JUNCTION CITY. The encounter which took place in northern Tay Ninh Province on 31 March - 1 April cost the Communists nearly 600 killed. In contrast, American casualties were reported as 11 killed and 68 wounded. The battle began when an estimated regimental-size enemy force attacked US forces of Operation JUNCTION CITY--the third such attack since 19 March--in an area approximately 25 miles northeast of Tay Ninh city. This apparently was an attempt to defend sensitive base areas, possibly containing a divisional-size headquarters.

2. JUNCTION CITY, the largest ground operation of the war, was designed to seek out and destroy major Communist forces and headquarters in War Zone "C." The opening phase of the operation--which has included as many as 23 combat battalions--got off to a slow start with few tangible results reported in the first weeks. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Communist troops successfully evaded the American forces by seeking sanctuary in Cambodia or more remote areas of Communist War Zone "C."

3. The second phase of JUNCTION CITY began on 18 March with the eastward repositioning of the American forces followed by the three subsequent ill-fated regimental-size Communist assaults. Over-all cumulative casualty figures now show more than 2,500 Communists killed and several base areas located and destroyed. American losses, in comparison, now total 233 killed and 1,266 wounded.

Viet Cong Plan Pullout in Face of Allied Threat in the Delta

4. The Viet Cong in the Mekong Delta province of Phong Dinh recently issued a directive regarding preparations for pulling back in the face of increased

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US-GVN pressure in the delta, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] This order was directed at the senior members of the People's Revolutionary Party.

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5. The directive called for the movement of some leaders and base areas into positions which would allow better access to escape routes into Cambodia should allied sweep operations endanger their security.

6. Emphasis was also placed on the collection of past-due taxes as well as the current 1967 taxes. Other reports have revealed similar advance planning on the part of the Viet Cong hierarchy at the provincial level.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Village Council elections began in South Vietnam today and from the preliminary reports they appear to have gotten under way without serious incident. Voter turnout, on the basis of a sprinkling of widely scattered returns, appears to be moderately heavy--somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 percent.

Constitution Promulgated

2. On 1 April, Chief of State Nguyen Van Thieu formally promulgated the newly created constitution at a brief and dignified ceremony on the grounds of the Doc Lap Palace. The ceremony was attended by the entire Constituent Assembly (CA) and Military Directorate, the People's Army Council, and various other individuals or representatives of organizations or groups. Notable for their absence among the representations from the major religious grouping were the Catholics who are piqued by the dropping of a reference to a supreme being from the preamble to the constitution.

3. Thieu was the chief speaker at the ceremony and he emphasized the need for continued unity and military civilian cooperation. He expressed gratitude for the results of the CA's labors, but urged them to complete work on the laws governing the selection of the president by the end of this month. This latter request will severely tax the CA if it attempts to complete work on the election law in less than a month. Thieu noted that the military government had accepted the new constitution without change--a remark which evoked the only applause during his speech. He also called for the formation of active political parties and a broad national front. The embassy comments that Thieu's reference to a national front may be a hint that the military may plan to launch a government party. Such a course of action apparently corresponds with the thoughts of both Thieu and Ky as to the type of organization which will endorse a military candidate.

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4. Conspicuously absent from Thieu's speech was the anticipated proclamation of the National Reconciliation program which would affect the destiny of individual members of the Viet Cong who might wish to serve the GVN. Although there is some speculation that the proclamation will occur in the near future, the GVN has been dragging its feet on the implementing of such a program for several months now.

Activities of Tran Van Don

5. Retired Major General Tran Van Don is reported to be seeking the best possible political deal he can get before committing himself to supporting any presidential candidate. In a recent conversation with an embassy officer, Don said that he prefers Ky over Thieu as a presidential aspirant. However, Don was not as definite about saying he would support Ky as he did in a previous conversation at the end of January. Don confided that he had offered his full support to Ky, if Ky would set up a "brain trust" which would include Don.

6. Don also indicated that other presidential hopefuls, but particularly Tran Van Huong, were soliciting his support. Don considers Huong's supporters to be too parochially "southern" in their outlook, and presumably is not interested in helping him.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

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The Military Debate Continues in Hanoi

3. Vietnamese Communist military planners apparently are still divided over certain basic issues relating to the war in South Vietnam. This is implicit in an article by General Hoang Minh Thao in the February issue of the party journal, Hoc Tap. In this article, Thao picked up the theme he enunciated in the December 1966 issue of Hoc Tap that in order to be successful in the South, the Communists must build up all three types of combat forces, main, local, and militia/self defense.

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4. General Thao appears to be attempting to lay out a middle ground between those who advocate primary emphasis on building main forces and those who believe the most pressing current need is to strengthen the irregulars. Despite his generally middle-of-the-road approach, General Thao came down somewhat harder on the need to develop the irregulars, on the grounds that "this task has not yet kept up with the developing war's requirements."

5. The irregulars are needed in South Vietnam, according to Thao's thesis, to "pin the enemy down, spread him out, and compel him to scatter," thus creating conditions for main force units "to annihilate him." Thao hastened to point out, however, that "to lead the people's war to total success, it is obviously not sufficient simply to wage a guerrilla war with the self-defense militia force and regional troops, because without large and powerful mobile main force units there can be no major battles in which the enemy is annihilated."

6. Thao also indicated that Hanoi has upped its estimate of how many US troops it may ultimately have to face in South Vietnam. He stated that even if US forces in the South reach one million troops the Communists can win. In the past Communist leaders have usually suggested that US forces in South Vietnam might reach about 500,000.

7. General Thao's article also delved at length into another problem which appears to have beset the Communists in South Vietnam for several years. This is the matter of the control of the party at all levels over the armed forces. As Thao put it, "the party's leadership over the people's armed forces is an absolute, direct, and comprehensive leadership." He pointed out that the "party central committee directly leads the armed forces... gives direct instructions and controls and stimulates the building of the armed forces and their combat performance." At the local level, Thao asserted, all units "are placed under the direct leadership of the party committees and party branches."

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8. Several captured Communist soldiers have reported that in some areas of South Vietnam, particularly in the 1964-1966 period, certain Viet Cong military commanders in their zeal to build larger combat forces competed with local party leaders for available manpower and concentrated on purely military problems to the detriment of Communist political programs.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. A notebook captured recently in South Vietnam contained notes taken at a briefing probably given in early 1966 by a high-level party official on a number of key issues. The briefing appeared to be essentially an indoctrination session to acquaint party cadre with central committee decisions on the war.

2. One of the issues discussed was the politburo's policy on negotiations. According to the briefer, the 11th central committee resolution (probably held in mid-1965) had pointed out that a situation might arise in which fighting and negotiations would be conducted simultaneously. He stated, however, that at present the situation was not ripe for negotiations. Fighting will continue, according to the speaker, until a situation emerges in which both sides are fighting "indecisively." Then, negotiations may take place while the fighting continues. In this event, "the side which fights more strongly will compel the adversary to accept its conditions."

3. The briefing spelled out in clear terms some of the advice Hanoi has been getting from foreigners. A number of countries want the DRV to enter into negotiations, "any form of negotiations," so that a big war does not break out, "regardless of the interests of Vietnam." He did not mention which countries have offered this advice but he said that "some other countries, mostly nationalist countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America," wonder whether the Communists can defeat the US, and, if not, whether Hanoi ought not to enter negotiations.

4. Eastern European countries hold the view, according to the Hanoi spokesman, that conditions are ripe for achieving success in negotiations. In parenthesis, the briefer added that under the Eastern European plan, the US would withdraw its troops, and the Vietnamese Communists will be able to "continue the struggle to achieve total success." He pointed out that the Eastern Europeans had posed a number of conditions for the US, such as the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam and the gradual withdrawal of US forces from the South.

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5. The Chinese Communist view of the problem is that conditions for negotiations are not yet ripe, "not until a few years from now, and, even worse, seven years from now." In the meantime, the Vietnamese Communists should continue fighting to bog down the US and should wait until China has built strong enough forces to launch an "all-out offensive."

6. Hanoi's policy, however, is "to continue fighting until a certain time when we can fight and negotiate at the same time." When this occurs, several possibilities will arise. One is that "the North conducts negotiations while the South continues fighting," another is that "the South also participates in the negotiations while continuing to fight." The briefer admonished his listeners that "if we stop fighting (at that stage), no considerable success can be achieved in negotiations." The notebook account of the briefing concluded the portion on negotiations with the note that the "politburo" will decide when to negotiate.

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